

Matthew 28:18-20

A Great Commitment to the Great Commission

Why are you here?

- That is a question that you may not have thought about in a while

There are a number of reasons why you may be here at church this morning

- Perhaps you were feeling “in the mood” since it is Christmastime
- Perhaps you wanted to end the year well by attending the church

The Bible outlines several overarching purposes for why we as a church exist

- I am sure that you are somewhat familiar with these

One purpose for the Church’s existence is to glorify God

- This is somewhat of an umbrella, comprehensive term

Everything that goes on here at CBC should be for the glory of God

- Every lesson taught
- Every song sung
- Every diaper changed
- Every word spoken
- Every handshake extended

Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “**Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**”

- Do “all” to the glory of God

Is that why you are here at CBC this morning?

- Are you determined to do all for the glory of God?
- Not for the applause or recognition of self or others?

A second purpose for the Church’s existence is to edify the Body

- We should be focused on encouraging and lifting up one another

Christians can become discouraged

- We need encouragement and support
- That should come primarily from the local church

In the exercise of spiritual gifts, Paul tells us

- “**since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church**” (1 Cor 14:12)

Did you know that every Christian is called upon to edify the body?

- That’s right!

You should come to church with the express intent to give, not receive, in this manner

- Come to church prepared to encourage someone
- Don’t come to church waiting for someone to encourage you!

A third purpose for the Church’s existence is teaching

- We are to grow in our knowledge of the Word of God
- God has given us teachers to help us achieve this goal

Peter exhorts his readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18)

- Again, that is a command, not an option

But there is another purpose for the Church that must not be overlooked

- Can you think of it?

In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ is presented as the King of the Jews

- Most Bible scholars readily admit this Gospel is the most Jewish of the four

But the way in which Matthew ends his Gospel is quite fascinating

- That is what we want to study this morning

Jesus Christ has been crucified by this time

- He has born the wrath for undeserving sinners
- He was the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world

Not only has Jesus died, but He has also been buried

- But on the third day, He arose from the dead!

Jesus made a number of appearances after His resurrection

- Matthew 28 records one of those post-resurrection appearances

Matthew 28:16 tells us, “the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee”

- Not “the Twelve”
- But “the eleven”

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, has already hanged himself (Mt 27:5)

- So the group’s number has shrunk from 12 to 11

The group isn’t referred to as apostles

- They are called “disciples”

The word implies a learner or follower

- But the word does not necessarily refer to a born-again believer

John 6:66 informs us that “many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.”

- Some who were following Christ for the wrong reasons left Him and didn’t return

But these 11 men were true disciples

- They had been born again
- They had been radically changed because of the Gospel

Jesus had told them that they should meet Him on a certain mountain in Galilee

- So they were obediently following Jesus, even after His death!

Why did Jesus inform these 11 men to travel from Jerusalem to Galilee?

- Why have them travel so far?

Some conservative Christians believe that there was a larger audience than just the 11 on the Galilean mountain.¹

- The apostle Paul comments that Jesus “**appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time**” (1 Cor 15:6)
- Could this be that occurrence?

Regardless of who was on the mountain, there was a group of Jesus’ followers there

- They were obeying Him, even after His death, burial, and resurrection
- Talk about living by faith!

Matthew 28:17 tells us, “**when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.**”

- What a mixed response!

Some “**worshiped**” Christ

- Others “**were doubtful**”

Again, we have to wonder who all was in the audience

- Was it just the Eleven?
- Or were there others?

Regardless, some were quick to worship

- Others doubted

Notice that the plural is used for both actions

- “**they**” – more than one – worshiped
- “**some**” – more than one – were doubtful

We remember Thomas who refused to believe Jesus’ resurrection unless he personally saw Jesus’ hands and side

- So doubt over Jesus’ resurrection wasn’t an entirely isolated matter with Thomas

Jesus doesn’t chide those who doubted

- In a rather gracious manner, He approaches nearer so that they can recognize Him

In the second half of verse 18 through verse 20, Jesus gives this small group of disciples a final charge

- It has been called the Great Commission

A commission is an assignment, task, duty, job or mission

- It was the responsibility of the disciples to carry this out

Let’s read Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission is really a call of obedience to every born-again believer

- It is not an option, but an obligation

¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 244.

In these three verses, Jesus unveils the three necessary elements that comprise His Great Commission to the Church

- God's power (28:18)
- God's priority (28:19-20a)
- God's presence (28:20b)

As I think about the life of CBC over the past few years, I think that evangelism has been a weakness of this local church

- As I have interacted with some of you and previous church leaders, I think that CBC has struggled with evangelism over the years

We are strong in Bible teaching

- We are caring and loving
- We are good at fellowship

But Jesus gave His disciples a final charge here in Matthew 28

- It is a charge that applies to every believer

I pray that the end of 2009 will show significant growth and progress in this area

- Frankly, it is a weakness in my own life
- And I am praying for God to show Himself strong in taking my weakness and using it for His glory

I. God's power (28:18)

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

Imagine this small group of disciples

- They had followed Jesus for three years during His public ministry
- They had watched Him teach, heal, rebuke, and serve others

But now He was gone

- He has died
- He was buried

He has said that He would rise again

- But perhaps they had not seen Him after His resurrection

I am sure that these men would have felt pretty intimidated

- They felt alone
- They felt vulnerable

But Jesus' opening words must have brought a sense of perspective to these disciples, **“All authority has been given to Me”**

- Here is the resurrected Christ speaking to them

His words tell of unbridled power and authority

- Not limited authority
- But **“all authority”**

What confidence this should have inspired in the lives of these disciples!

- Here is Jesus, their Lord and Savior, reminding them that He has been given ultimate authority

This authority extends “in heaven and on earth”

- The scope of Jesus’ authority is astounding!
- It is limitless!

The disciples would not have to rely upon their own abilities, strengths, talents, and resources

- The Great Commission is about realizing the scope of God’s unlimited power

This doesn’t mean that we don’t have a responsibility

- We can’t sit back and expect God to do everything
- We can’t merely, “let go and let God”

No, dear friend

- We have a tremendous responsibility

But let me remind you to trust in God’s power

- Lean upon Him and not your own understanding

II. God’s priority (28:19-20a)

The actual heartbeat of the Great Commission is highlighted in verse 19 and the first part of verse 20

- These verses should be extremely familiar and important to you

I have heard these verses taught many times over the years

- But they haven’t always been taught correctly
- Perhaps you have heard incorrect teaching on this crucial passage

As we walk through this passage, I pray that God will illuminate your heart to understand His Word like never before

- And I pray that you will take action based on what you hear and understand

Go therefore

I mentioned last week that in the Greek language, word order is very important

- What is placed at the beginning of a sentence is very important

We see that even in the English language, don’t we?

- We place emphasis on what is at the beginning of a sentence

Consider these two statements

- “Friend, you need to repent and trust Christ”
- “Repent, friend, and trust Christ!”

You can tell that in the second example, I am stressing the aspect of repentance in a stronger manner than the first

Many have misunderstood what Christ was trying to tell His disciples

- In other words, what is the main verb of the sentence?

Some will tell you that Jesus' main thought is "Go!"

- Others will tell you that "make disciples" or "baptizing" or "teaching" is the main thought

There is only one imperative in the Great Commission, "make disciples"

- Everything else is secondary to this thought

That means that the other verbal participles are secondary and subordinate to the main thought of making disciples

- Going
- Baptizing
- Teaching

Granted, it is impossible for the Church to fulfill the Great Commission if we don't "go"

- We can't expect unbelievers to come to the Church on their own initiative
- We have to go reach the lost

When you go fishing, do you pull up near the water and expect the fish to jump into the boat?

- No!
- You have to go where the fish are

That may sound comical, but isn't it tempting to think of evangelism in those terms?

- "I'll just pray from my home instead of going witnessing"
- "I'll just give money to missions instead of going myself"

The way in which Jesus phrases this sentence, "go" isn't necessarily a command

- It is an assumption

Jesus assumes that His followers have already made the effort to "go"

- But not all of us have been obedient

God created the Jewish people to be a light to the Gentiles

- The Jews were to take the saving message to the pagan nations so that they might be delivered
- But they weren't always faithful

The Church is to take the message to the nations in hopes that they might be delivered

- But we haven't always been faithful to the task

In many cases, if we are honest, the Great Commission has become the Great Omission

- We have totally missed the mark

Rich Barnds asked us two weeks ago, "When was the last time that you shared the Gospel with someone?"

- How did you fare?

Has it been a few days, weeks, or months?

- Did you share the Gospel with anyone in 2008?

I am so grateful that I don't have to save anyone

- It is not our task to "win" the lost

It is our task to proclaim the Gospel as often as we can to unbelievers

- We leave the results with God!

Notice that Jesus tells His disciples, “Go therefore”

- In other words, remind yourself as you go that you are going in the power of God Himself
- He has ultimate and sovereign power and authority in heaven and earth!

and make disciples of all the nations,

Now we come to the main thought of the Great Commission, “make disciples of all the nations”

- This is the imperative that Christ would have for us to consider

We have already noted the use of “disciples” in verse 16

- Followers
- Learners

We use the word “discipleship” quite a bit

- But do we understand that discipleship is the passionate heartbeat of the Great Commission?
- Do you understand that every believer should be involved with discipleship?

Every Christian is a lifetime learner and follower of Christ

- We never stop learning
- We never stop following

Once you are saved, you should try to learn as much as you can as quickly as you can

- Ideally, someone would come alongside you and offer to disciple you

Raise your hand if you were personally disciplined by someone after your conversion

- My guess is that most of us did not have that privilege

But how sad it is that discipleship is the very heart of the Great Commission

- And yet many of us were never disciplined by another believer

This is why the Great Commission cannot be simply evangelism

- Evangelism simply brings the Gospel to unbelievers

What do you do with someone who embraces Christ?

- Do you simply bring them to church and hope they fare ok?

I believe that if you are the instrument through which someone comes to faith in Christ, God would have you disciple that person

- “But Kevin,” you may say, “I don’t know enough to teach a new Christian!”

If that is your admission, then you yourself need to be disciplined!

- I think a great way of accomplishing this is the Fundamentals of the Faith class
- Providentially, that class is being taught every Sunday morning during SS

There comes a point, however, when you must invest what you have learned into the lives of others

- You can’t stay in the mode of being taught
- You yourself must teach others

Earlier I mentioned that Matthew is perhaps the most Jewish Gospel of the four

- But look at what Jesus tells His followers

He says, “**make disciples of all the nations**”

- At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He told His apostles to go to the lost sheep of Israel
- Not to the Gentiles

But the Jews rejected the message

- So Jesus sent them to the Gentiles as well

Even in the book of Romans, we read these familiar words, “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek**” (Rom 1:16)

- The Gospel was to go to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles

Who does Jesus want to be saved?

- “**all the nations**”

Who does Jesus want to be discipled?

- Believers from “**all the nations**”

This process of discipleship should be repeated and reproduced throughout the ages, until Christ comes back again

One of the things I have learned over the ages is to have a Paul and a Timothy in my life

- A Paul – someone who I can learn from; someone who is teaching me
- A Timothy – someone who I can teach, instruct, and guide

I would ask you this morning, “Who is your Paul? Who is your Timothy?”

- Who is personally interacting with you, instructing you and guiding you?
- Who are you personally interacting with to teach and guide?

baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Once an unbeliever comes to faith in Christ, what is he/she to do?

- Jesus lists baptism

Baptism is the outward identification of a believer with the Lord Jesus Christ

- A believer is making his/her allegiance and commitment to Christ known to the church community

The thought of a believer not being baptized runs counter to the tenor of Scripture

- The only exception from the Bible is the thief on the cross
- But he was moments from his death and couldn’t come down from the cross

If you are here this morning and have never outwardly identified yourself in baptism, then I would encourage you to talk to Phil or me about this

- It would be our joy to speak to you about when you can be baptized here, as part of our worship service

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you:

Jesus says that after baptism, the disciples are to be taught “to observe all that I commanded you”

This should answer the question, “What do I teach a new believer?”

- Simple – all that Jesus commanded!

Again, this is not optional

- This is part of the Great Commission

I was never personally disciplined by anyone after I came to faith in Christ

- Instead of attending youth group, I was in the adult SS classes wanting to learn
- I attended church as often as I could, since my parents were unbelievers and didn't take me to church

I remember my first night of Bible college

- I felt like I knew the Bible pretty well

I was invited to this guy's dorm room to play Bible Trivia

- I was absolutely humiliated
- This guy knew all the answers, even the verses that went with the answers

Afterwards, I asked him if he had learned all of this during the 2 years of Bible college

- He laughed and said that he had learned most of this from his own Bible studies

Believer, you know as much of the Bible as you want to know

- The only thing holding you back is your own desire, self-control, and discipline

I have a great desire to know God's Word

- I know a lot about the Word
- But I want to know more

Listen to what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3, “I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:8)

- This was a guy who had walked with the Lord for years!

Are you trusting in God's power?

- Or are you relying upon your own limited power and resources?

Are you committed to God's priority – the Great Commission?

- If not, what are you really living for?

Jesus has one more thing to say to His disciples

- It is a very encouraging reminder of His presence

III. God's presence (28:20b)

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

It is easy to become overwhelmed with Jesus' statement here at the end of the Gospel of Matthew

- It is intimidating because our work will never be completed
 - o Unbelievers need the proclamation of the Gospel
 - o Believers need the instruction from the Word

But Jesus reiterates that He will always be with His disciples, no matter what

- That is what He says at the end of verse 20

To capture the attention of His disciples, Jesus uses a certain word, “lo”

- Other English translations have “**behold**” or “**surely**”

This word is a spiritual speedbump, designed to get our attention

- Jesus is saying, “Listen! What I am about to say is very important! Don't miss it!”

You remember when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush

- God told Moses that He would be sending him to deliver the nation of Israel

Moses asked, “**Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?’**” (Ex 3:13)

- That's a fair question, isn't it?
- What is the name of this great God Who is sending Moses?

God answers, “**‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’**””

- God revealed Himself to be “**I AM**”

With this designation, God revealed Himself to be self-existent and eternal

- The I AM – not the I was or will be
- The I AM – not dependent upon anyone or anything

Jesus uses the “I AM” formula a number of times in the Gospels in reference to Himself

- “**I am the bread of life**” (John 6:35)
- “**I am the light of the world**” (John 8:12)
- “**I am the door of the sheep**” (John 10:7)
- “**I am the good shepherd**” (John 10:11)
- “**I am the resurrection and the life**” (John 11:25)
- “**I am the way, the truth, and the life**” (John 14:6)
- “**I am the true vine**” (John 15:1)

There are other, more subtle uses of this formula in the Gospels

- But these are the ones that are familiar to us

Jesus uses these various titles in reference to Himself

- In essence, Jesus is claiming to be Yahweh, the same God who appeared to Moses!

You can understand why some of the Jews wanted to stone Jesus!

- He was claiming to be eternal and equal with God!

Here in Matthew 28, Jesus uses a special use of the formula for “I AM”

- It is the only time that Jesus uses this specific usage

In most cases when Jesus uses the “I AM” formula, the Greek words are ἐγὼ εἰμι

- ἐγὼ - the emphatic use of “I”
 - o It could be translated, “I myself”
- εἰμι – the normal verb for “I am”

For example, Jesus says, “**I am the bread of life**” (John 6:35)

- Literally, it is, “**I Myself AM the bread of life**”
- Do you hear the emphatic nature of Jesus’ claim?

But here in Matthew 28, Jesus does something unusual

- He separates the ἐγὼ from the εἰμι

That may not sound very important to you

- But it is huge

Remember, the “I AM” is the very name of God by which He revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush

- It was to be the name by which He would be proclaimed

But here in Matthew 28, Jesus actually separates these two elements of His own name!

- Why?

The Greek phrase that Jesus utters is as follows, ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι

- Let’s look at those one word at a time
 - o ἐγὼ - emphatic I
 - o μεθ’ - with
 - o ὑμῶν - you
 - o εἰμι – I am

So you could translate this phrase, “I with you AM”

- The name of God is still there, “I AM”
- But something “interrupts” the name of God

Jesus makes it clear that the I AM would be with them forever

- Believers – followers, disciples, learners – would be “in Christ” and Christ would be in them
- The apostle Paul is very fond of using the phrase, “in Christ”

How long would this be a reality?

- “**always, even to the end of the age**”

Did you notice the uses of “all” or “every” in the Great Commission?²

- Verse 18 – “**all authority**”
- Verse 19 – “**all the nations**”
- Verse 20a – “**all that I commanded you**”
- Verse 20b – “**always**”

² D.A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Matthew*, 594.

God has been given all authority to send us into all the nations to teach believers all that He has commanded so that His presence would always be with us

- Amazing!

This is the Great Commission

- God's power
- God's priority
- God's presence

On a scale from 1-10 (1 being low and 10 being high), where is your commitment to the Great Commission?

- That's a question that only you can answer

Wherever you are, there is room for improvement and progress

- I pray that you will make that a matter of prayer and priority for 2009

Our involvement with the Great Commission may look different in each of our lives

- We aren't the same, so our fulfillment of the Great Commission will look different

But the reality is that every one of us is called to take a part in the Great Commission

- Make disciples!
 - o Go – get out of your comfort zone and interact with believers
 - o Baptize – show believers their need of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ
 - o Teach – show them everything you have learned from Scripture and then grow together

Imagine how different CBC would be if every one of us did this

- Our conversations would revolve around lost souls
- We would be praying for one another
- We would be strategizing outreach events
- We would be having discipleship meetings at each other's homes

The Great Commission is bigger than any one of us here this morning

- It is something that only God can bring about

This is an area of my life that I pray God will change for His glory

- How do I plan on achieving this?

Here are some sample ideas

- Meditate on the Gospel daily
 - o Remind myself of what God has done for me, an undeserving sinner
 - o Remind myself that unbelievers around me will face a Christless eternity unless they repent of their sins
- Proclaim the Gospel regularly
 - o Make it a point to proclaim the Gospel with unbelievers on a regular basis
- Encourage other believers in this area as well
 - o I need your accountability and I pray that I can hold you accountable
- Rejoice in the Gospel!
 - o Worship God with greater fervor and passion for being the Savior and the Lamb of God

Lest I be misunderstood, I do not have numerical increase in mind

- I have never focused my ministry on numbers
- And I don't intend to change now

But if God is gracious, and we are faithful, we will see new faces in our midst

- Unbelievers and believers alike

Let's focus on the Great Commission

- Let's make 2009, "The Year of the Gospel"

Let's work hard at praying for the lost and proclaiming the Gospel to them

- Let's depend upon the Lord's power to achieve His priority, being assured of His presence